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AP Language & Composition – Period 2

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Restoring America’s Pastime

*(Section I)* Between the historical players, immaculate records, and the smell of sweaty socks and chewing tobacco stands a gloomy cloud over the sport of baseball. In recent years, a period known as the Steroid Era has captured the magic and excitement of baseball and turned the sport into a wasteland of cheating, lying, and despair. Aside from steroids, other contributing factors such as free agency and large payrolls have made baseball much less genuine than it once was.

*(Section II)* Steroids have become the dark face of baseball, but as Hall of Famer Mike Schmidt proclaims, “Athletes such as Alex Rodriguez and Barry Bonds could’ve played just as well back in the day.” Mike was an MLB Legend as he won two World Series titles with the Philadelphia Phillies, took home numerous MVP awards, and much gratitude for the game. He was also a member of the 500 Club, which refers to hitting over 500 home runs in his renowned ML career. Mike Schmidt was a passionate and peaceful guy who loved the game of baseball and all of these attributes certainly make him a credible source when discussing where baseball has gone and where it is going.

Growing up around baseball since he was a little tyke, Mike Schmidt was always fascinated with the sport of baseball. The idea for him to write *Clearing the Bases* was a brilliant way to introduce his knowledge of the game to his fans and avid readers interested in baseball. Mike’s main reasons for writing his book are very clear and simplistic; He loved the game dearly, he has seen the dramatic changes the game has encountered, and he wants to fix baseball to its original state. Mike was around the game when steroids might have just began to peak (in the mid-late 80’s) and never once was confronted about taking or using steroids. Mike also brings up some important points in his book when he talks about the development of free agency and the ways in which money became a deciding factor on many major leaguers’ careers. In “Clearing the Bases” Mike’s rookie season came in 1978 with the Phillies, and he recalled all of the guys he originally played with. The ironic side of the story is that as free agency made over MLB, Mike had not a single teammate on the Phillies that he began with back in ’78. The free agency market opened up opportunities for ML players to be waived from their current team and traded or signed by a different team for a greater amount of cash. Throughout the book it seems as though Mike wasn’t a big fan of free agency, yet he never really complained about its existence in baseball. Free agency was one of a few major adjustments baseball encountered, and it was not until later on in Mike’s career that he realized baseball’s largest discrepancy was yet to surface.

*(Section III)* First and foremost, baseball has been blessed to have inherited such astounding athletes over the last century, many of which have been inducted into the Hall of Fame and some even become American heroes. In the Modern Era, baseball has many elite athletes worthy of recognition and award for their respect and dignity towards the game. However, over the last two decades, a monsoon of scandals and cheating swept across the sport. Steroids became a prevalent part of baseball as early as 1980, and have stayed a major part of the sport even recently with Manny Ramirez’s 50-game suspension for drug use. Records have essentially been tarnished and players have become untrustworthy and undeniably not as good as they may appear. A monumental record such as the home run record by Hank Aaron (755 HR) was broken in 2007 by Barry Bonds, who (unknowingly) took performance enhancing drugs. Records that many thought would never be broken are being eaten away and taken over by players who forever in their career will have an asterisk next to their name. To go on and say that Barry isn’t a good player without his juice is absolutely untrue, but does he willingly deserve a record in baseball given the fact that he did cheat? I don’t want to be hard on the guy, since he hasn’t been convicted of steroid use up until now but the evidence is all around him, and I don’t think there’s any denying what he did. In conclusion, steroids have opened a gateway of questions trying to determine what records are real and which are tainted. The idea to quarantine all of baseball’s players accused of steroid use would greatly benefit MLB until they can formidably delve into the records and files that will effectively conclude which players are real and which are fake. This action should be taken in order to save a part of baseball’s authenticity and would be a relief to former superstar players to know their records stand tall and bold in Cooperstown.

During the middle of “Clearing the Bases” Mike Schmidt looks back on the years directly after he announced his retirement. He recalls the few years following his departure from baseball how he utterly lost all interest in baseball and found it almost impossible to gain any curiosity for the sport he loved for so long. Then… along came Barry Bonds, Sammy Sosa, Mark McGuire, and a few others of interest to sweep down and revive the game of baseball. Schmidt remembers gaining back his enthusiasm for the game as America watched in awe as these power sluggers went for 50-55-60 home runs in a single season! The thought of steroids was nothing but a snow flake on a baking summer road, and America had become hooked on the rush and excitement of baseball once again. It wasn’t until the early 2000’s when rumors began to disperse about alleged steroid use around MLB. The names featured in the rumors were big names like Bonds, Sosa, etc. which absolutely shocked America. Flying ahead to present day, Schmidt acknowledges that he “would have used steroids to gain that little edge.” Schmidt believes that steroids may have paralyzed the records in Cooperstown, but he can’t can not deny the fact that suspected athletes would still be brute athletes regardless if they used performance enhancers or not. Schmidt’s counterargument is debatable but in all seriousness, it is not fair to let an athlete who cheated the game into the Baseball Hall of Fame. I can’t say that I disagree with Schmidt’s statement on athletes being decent whether or not they used drugs but I certainly think anyone accused or convicted of using steroids should not be allowed anywhere near the baseball Hall of Fame. The players and records kept inside that sacred building are there for a reason and cheating should not be accepted into a lavish place such as that. Although mine and Mike’s opinions might be split of Hall of Fame voting, I think it’s safe to say that most athletes connected with steroids would still make terrifically talented athletes without juicing.

*(Section IV)* Though baseball has and still is experiencing tough issues in and around the sport, large payrolls aren’t one of the main dilemmas in the sport. I’m not entirely against hefty payrolls in MLB because the fact of the matter is, that is where the money is. Vaunel Pierre of the Eagle News at Florida Gulf Coast University wrote in his column that “baseball is in serious need of a salary cap” meaning a spending limit for all 30 MLB teams (Pierre). Although I do find it unfair the Yankees, Red Sox, and Cubs, just to name a few, attract all of the superstar athletes, it is not the team’s fault that they inherit such a large payroll. The other issue I have with a price ceiling is that if every MLB team has a fixed spending limit, the negotiations for players will be crazier than ever and teams will be dropping even more loads of money to try to reel in the best players because numerous other teams will be bidding for them also. Sure Alex Rodriguez earns about the same amount of money than the entire Florida Marlins roster, but as I recall the Marlins won 2 World Series titles. In my opinion, the payrolls in baseball should be left alone because the Marlins proved to baseball, “It doesn’t matter how much money you shell out, a champion is determined by who wants it more.”

*(Section V)* Mike Schmidt presented me with a plethora of knowledge and insight into the world of baseball, how it has changed, and ways to make it better. “A cheater never wins” is an appropriate quote to add in to this entire paper because I don’t feel any cheater deserves recognition for cheating. Mike was quite a reliable source to turn to for the background of baseball and he left me, and hopefully the reader, with more understanding as to how baseball changed and how to improve the game to the way it was. I agree the Steroid Era and free agency tarnished part of baseball’s legacy but baseball has passed by that dark cloud and is making its way back into the sunlight. Baseball’s legacy had once been thought to be tarnished, but slowly and surely baseball is returning to become America’s pastime as it once was.

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